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EVANGELISM IN THE ARMY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                      |    |
|------------------------------------------------------|----|
| I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .                            | 1  |
| II. THE MEANING AND HISTORY OF EVANGELISM . . . . .  | 2  |
| III. THE ETHICS OF EVANGELISM IN THE ARMY . . . . .  | 4  |
| IV. SOME METHODS OF EVANGELISM IN THE ARMY . . . . . | 7  |
| V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION . . . . .                  | 9  |
| SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .                      | 10 |

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Army is made up of people. Sins and terrors have always been part of mans experience. The Army has always been faced with the sins and ills of man. Society has perhaps been more conscious of the results of sin in the Army with the publicity of My Lai, the Woolridge case, the graft and kick-backs of Army contracts and the increased drug addiction.

We do not make fun nor belittle the honest pilgrimage of other men; but it is neither discourteous nor provincial to believe that the peace and joy for which all mankind is yearning is to be found nowhere else but in the love of God through Jesus Christ his Son.<sup>1</sup>

It was Albert Schweitzer who said.

Take heaven away and you have no earth left. Without this sacred prediction of eternal meaning to mortal purpose, man rots and riots in absurdity. Without this God for man to be for or against, man has nothing else to do. He is incapable of doing anything other than killing himself in the battle against God or finding his life in surrender to God.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper will be to define the meaning and history of evangelism, to look at the ethics of practicing evangelism in the Army and to mention some current methods of evangelism used in the Army.

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel A. Redding, "Last Altar Call," Christianity Today 12 (22 December 1967): 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus (New York: MacMillan, 1960), p. 403.

## II. THE MEANING AND HISTORY OF EVANGELISM

In the New Testament the Greek word "evaggelion" means good news. Evangelism is the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and sonship with God restored through Christ. It is the proclaiming of the good news of salvation to others.

Our Lord Jesus Christ in his resurrection glory gave to his followers for all time to come an imperative evangelistic commission.

All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus said that his ministry and mission in the world was evangelism.<sup>2</sup> He was an evangelist for he also "preached the gospel."<sup>3</sup> Jesus in his final resurrection appearance promised to direct his followers where and to whom they should evangelize.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the disciples of Jesus were driven out of Jerusalem after his ascension and they were evangelistic.<sup>5</sup> There were others who are mentioned in the New Testament by name as being evangelist, Paul,<sup>6</sup> Phillip,<sup>7</sup> and Timothy.<sup>8</sup>

In the order of the ministry, as defined by Paul in the New Testament, the evangelist precedes that of the pastor and teacher.<sup>9</sup> This bears out the modern interpretation of evangelism, presenting the gospel to those ignorant of it before.

The early centuries after Christ had some outstanding leaders of

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<sup>1</sup>Matt. 28:19-20. <sup>2</sup>Luke 19:10. <sup>3</sup>Luke 20:1. <sup>4</sup>Acts 1:8. <sup>5</sup>Acts 8:4.

<sup>6</sup>Romans 1:15. <sup>7</sup>Acts 21:8. <sup>8</sup>II Tim. 4:5.

evangelism, Constantine, Augustine, Justinian, and Gregory. But then followed many centuries of dark ages for the church and with the exception of Saint Francis, John Tauler, Savonarola and a few others, there were no outstanding voices of evangelism.

In the early part of the sixteenth century, beginning with Luther and the Protestant Reformation, there came dynamic evangelistic leaders in men like Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, Wesley and others. The nineteenth century began under the power of a great nation-wide revival in America. This revival was one of the most far-reaching in Christian history for as a result many nations are evangelistic and missionary in the twentieth century.

The early Christians seemingly argued about everything except evangelism. Today many Christian groups spend most of their time arguing about evangelism.

There are three prevalent concepts of evangelism today. One concept views it as recruitment for the extension of the church. A second concept is a radical secularized view where the key is involvement as found in demonstration, community organization and politics in response to revolution. The third concept focuses on decision and proclamation in which individual salvation results from an isolated religious experience as an end result.<sup>1</sup>

All three concepts are involved in evangelism. Evangelism means the presentation of Jesus Christ, in word and deed, in the power of the Spirit, so that all men turn to God, follow Christ as Lord in the fellowship of the way and serve Him in their daily lives.

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<sup>1</sup>Leighton Ford, "Evangelism Is," Christianity Today 12 (13 September 1968): 59-60.

### III. THE ETHICS OF EVANGELISM IN THE ARMY

Implicit in the First Amendment is the guarantee that religion in its various denominational forms may be freely exercised and propagated. Our government has not hesitated to encourage its citizens to support religion, because of the benign effect which it has on the lives of individual citizens, families, and the whole common-wealth. Almost without exception the relationship of government to the churches in the land has been friendly. The sympathetic attitude is especially reflected in the area of the chaplaincy. The United States government acknowledged that it had no right and no ability to sustain the spirit of man and that this properly was the sphere of the churches. Therefore, the establishment of the chaplaincies followed and the development has been gradual dating back to the Continental Army. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution may be constitutional basis for chaplains in the Armed Forces.<sup>1</sup>

The ecclesiastical position of a chaplain is conceived of as deriving solely from the church body which endorses him.<sup>2</sup> The Churches, not the government, are looked on as the calling and disciplinary agents in the ecclesiastical standing of the chaplains.

The primary mission of the chaplain is to provide for the religious and moral needs of military personnel and their dependents.<sup>3</sup> The commander

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Pfeffer, Church State and Freedom (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Army Field Manual 16-5, "The Chaplain", December 1967, paragraph 2-9, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Department of the Army Regulation 165-20, "Duties of Chaplains and Commanders' Responsibilities", 22 August 1972, paragraph 4, p. 3.

will provide logistical support to the chaplain to perform his duties. The government does not imply by regulations that it has an interest and in any way seeks to meddle in the church's prime work of saving souls for heaven or evangelism. This is recognized as the chaplains proper sphere.

The chaplain as an officer fulfills one function for the government and another simultaneously for the church by carrying out the vows of the ministry which he made to God and church. Government is being realistic when it makes available the chaplaincy program to the churches. It has its own purposes in view and expects that these purposes will be achieved more or less as side effects of the work which the churches are primarily interested in doing through their own clergymen and in their own way.

Evangelism in the Army as to its method and ethical practice is the responsibility of the commander. The chaplain is the officer to whom the commander seeks guidance in this area. This is usually true whether it involves soldiers or dependents and whether it involves groups connected with the chapel or outside groups.

The chaplain by virtue of his endorsement, must practice the ethical guidelines of evangelism of his denomination. If ethical standards are violated and it is a denominational problem, then the problem would be worked out between the Chief of Chaplains Office and the denomination. If it was an individual problem, then the Chief of Chaplains Office and/or the denomination would work it out with the individual chaplain.

Evangelism in the Army and how it is practiced is a command responsibility. However, the chaplain is qualified and trained to assist the commander in this responsibility. The chaplain who fails in this duty not only fails the Army, but fails his church as well.

Evangelism in the Army is ethical as long as it does not violate the First Amendment of the Constitution. In reality, evangelism in the Army is a reflection of the evangelism practiced and accepted by the civilian church denominations who indorse chaplains into the Army.

#### IV. SOME METHODS OF EVANGELISM IN THE ARMY

There are many methods of evangelism practiced in the Army. Some will be mentioned, but there are probably as many methods as there are dedicated innovative Christians in the Army.

The local unit chapel will usually promote several programs of evangelism. They include the worship services held in the chapel, especially innovative worship services designed for evangelism. Many chapels sponsor prayer breakfasts in their units which are evangelistic in purpose. Coffee houses sponsored by the chapel have been a most effective evangelistic program utilizing lay personnel. Bible study groups, meeting in the home or in the chapel, have been effective in many places. The providing of the Word of God free to those who desire it is a method of evangelism for almost every Army chapel. A chapel visitation program is a widely used evangelistic program. Many chapels have utilized a Duty Day With God and revival services for evangelism. Evangelism in the local chapel depends upon the zeal, inspiration, innovation and dedication of the chaplain and the congregation.

Some methods of evangelism are usually sponsored by a post or installation rather than a unit chapel. Many of the methods mentioned for the local chapel could be repeated for the post, but for the sake of space, only additional methods will be mentioned. The religious education program provides one of the most effective ways of evangelizing the dependents of military personnel. This would include Sunday School, Vacation Church School, youth groups, choirs, PWOC, PMOC and religious retreats. Another post-wide method of evangelism is a ministry of visitation to military personnel living

in the civilian community. One such program was the Fort Carson Evangelism Models Program for the Chief of Chaplains Office called "Outreach".<sup>1</sup> Some posts have scheduled evangelistic workshops which have proven to be most effective in instructing active Christian laymen on how to be effective evangelists.

There are nondenominational, interdenominational and denominational groups which practice evangelism within the Army community. They should have permission of the post or unit commander. This is best coordinated through the respective chaplain. Some of these groups are Campus Crusade, Navigators, The Jesus People and Pentecostal groups.

Evangelism is one of the most important aspects of any chapel program. There are basically two types of evangelism, public and personal. Both types are necessary in the Army setting. The post religious program, each unit chapel program and every Christian should be concerned and committed to the practice of evangelism. This is a Christian commission. Some of the methods of evangelism will be time tested and others will be new and imaginative if evangelism is to be effective in the Army.

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<sup>1</sup>Everette Greene, "Outreach", Evangelism Models Program for the Chief of Chaplains United States Army, Fort Carson, Colorado, July 1973.

## V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Army is not exempt from sin because it is made up of people. Men do not change behavior merely by putting on a uniform. The Army with its discipline and control over the soldier does not have a solution to every issue that confronts man.

The Army has the responsibility to make available to the soldier the opportunity to find answers for his basic needs. Jesus Christ is adequate to meet human need at every level.

Evangelism has been from the beginning of Christianity, a vital part of personal commitment to Jesus Christ. To become a Christian in the New Testament concept is to become an evangelist.

The government and the First Amendment have given the Army the chaplain to meet the moral and religious needs of its members. The chaplain should assist the commander whose responsibility it is to ensure that the practice of evangelism in the Army is ethical.

The chaplain will seek through the chapel program to utilize time tested methods and new approaches to make evangelism effective in the Army. Ours is a nation where the majority of people have worshipped and depended on Almighty God. The opportunity for evangelism in the Army is necessary for the morale of the United States soldier.

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